

County gets environmental award

By LILLIAN KAFKA

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Prince William County's risk management crew is proud of its environmental services facility on Dumfries Road.

On Tuesday Virginia Department of Environmental Quality's Regional Director Jeff Steers is going to present the county an Environmental Excellence, E2, certificate for that facility.

The E2 status is nothing to sneeze at, according to county officials.

They've hired a consultant to advise them on making the vehicle and chemical distribution facility safer for the environment.

That means less diesel fuel spraying accidentally from the pumps, no oily run off from dirt trucks and a cleaner building inside and out. The county installed oil and grit separators where it washes vehicles to trap run off before it hits nearby streams. The diesel tank where trucks fuel up is surrounded by a wall where rainwater is collected and cleaned so it doesn't pollute area water sources.

Employees there are trained to clean spills, prevent spills and close containers so the fumes don't release volatile organic compounds into the air.

These are just a few of the requirements, among writing procedures, to lessen the facility's impact on the environment that DEQ requires for E2 certification.

"The employees buy in to this because they live here. They want to go fishing, enjoy the parks and green spaces here," said Bernard Osilka, a safety specialist for the county.

Craig Gerhart, county executive, said the E2 certification is an important system to have in place to make sure what happened in Roanoke a few years ago doesn't happen in Prince William.

In the 1980s, DEQ discovered an employee practice in Roanoke to prevent weeds from growing along a fence line, diesel fuel was sprayed on the plants, Gerhart said.

After years of investigation, DEQ found buried barrels of hazardous road-marking paint and since then Roanoke has spent millions cleaning up the mess.

Since attending that seminar, Gerhart told the Board of County Supervisors that it's important for them to take a proactive approach to handling their chemical and vehicle facilities.

Last year supervisors adopted an environmental policy statement committing the county to integrate "pollution prevention, waste management and natural resource conservation into all of Prince William County government's planning and decision making."

So far the environmental services facility near the county landfill has seen \$20,500 in dramatic changes, according to staff there.

"These guys have done a tremendous job transforming the shop," said Wade Hugh, acting watershed management branch chief for the county.

Fertilizer, mosquito spray, gypsy moth spray and paint are all labeled, stored and kept neat to prevent mixing, fires and spills.

Plus, the shop is orderly.

Emergency spill kits are located throughout the building and on each public works vehicle.

"This is not a sprint. It's a marathon," said Matt Groff, a public works employee.

He said the transformation process to the Exemplary Environmental Excellence certification, or E3 status, is an ongoing effort to improve the facility there.

Spending planned in 2005 to attain more E2 certifications include \$295,000 at the solid waste facility and \$300,000 for the fleet management division.

After they're finished at the facility on Dumfries Road, risk management staff said they'd make efforts to also bring the county's print shop and building and grounds facilities into compliance.

"It's a system, not just training," said Groff. "There's also awareness training, making written statements of procedures and looking at the environmental impacts on air, water and waste."

Other localities and businesses that have attained E2 status include Manassas City's water treatment plant and maintenance garage, Lockheed Martin, the Safeway stores on Old Bridge Road and Merchant's Plaza, the U.S. Marine Corps advanced amphibious assault vehicle program in Woodbridge and DEQ's northern Virginia office in Woodbridge.

BAE Systems, a defense contractor in Manassas has attained E3 certification.

And Belmont Bay's harbor in Woodbridge is a participant in the Virginia Clean Marina Program, part of the E2 system.